

[Editor's Note: This issue is dedicated to articles solicited from the Chicago Historical Society's documentation project, "Global Communities: Chicago's Immigrants and Refugees" under the direction of Peter T. Alter. As you will see in the articles, the authors have relied heavily on interviews, in many cases of family members, to write these articles; only a few secondary sources have been published on this volume's topic, "Immigrants and Refugees in Illinois since 1945." We believe students here have demonstrated their capacity to contribute to works that future historians will write on this important and fascinating subject. The Illinois Historic Preservation Agency thanks Peter Alter and the Chicago Historical Society for their substantial contribution to this volume.
Keith A. Sculle]

Global Communities: Chicago's Immigrants and Refugees

Peter T. Alter
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Chicago has seen a tremendous demographic change since 1945. Historically a city largely populated by European and African Americans, Chicago attracted people from all over the globe after World War II, becoming one of the most ethnically, racially, and religiously diverse cities in the world by the 1990s. To record this great shift in the city's demographics, the Chicago Historical Society conducted a documentation project, *Global Communities: Chicago's Immigrants and Refugees*. Although immigration to Chicago is nothing new, *Global Communities* highlights an overlooked phenomenon that developed after 1945.

Many people realize that during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries European immigrants and African-American migrants settled in the Chicago area permanently. Furthermore, most people also recognize that many immigrants and refugees have come to Chicago since 1945. According to the 2000 federal census, roughly 28.4 million American residents are foreign born, representing about ten percent of this country's residents. Perhaps we have interacted with or seen immigrants and refugees who may be classmates, co-workers, neighbors, or friends. Yet, most of us know very little about these newer Chicagoans and their histories and cultures. It is this void that *Global Communities* addressed.

Although certainly not all inclusive, *Global Communities* documented the history of five recent immigrant and refugee groups to the Chicago area, covering portions of the Asian Indian, Mexican, Polish, Romanian, and Vietnamese communities. Public historians, volunteers, and a National Museum Fellow conducted research, yielding oral and video histories, video and photographic documentation, and the addition of two and three-dimensional artifacts to Chicago Historical Society's permanent collection. Many individuals and organizations contacted by *Global Communities* generously donated artifacts. In a symbolic effort to support neighborhood businesses, project staff also purchased some three-dimensional materials from local shops.

While these efforts bore fruit for the Historical Society, *Global Communities* sought to expand the project further to cover other immigrant groups and to publicize the project more widely. Working with *Illinois History: A Magazine for Young People*,

Global Communities sought essays from Chicago-area middle and high school students on the history of post-1945 immigrants and refugees in Chicagoland. *Global Communities* targeted Chicago-area schools that have high concentrations of immigrants. Those schools were Stephen Tyng Mather High School, Nicholas Senn High School, and William Howard Taft High School in Chicago and St. Lambert School in Skokie. Both Senn and Taft High Schools operate International Newcomer Centers for immigrant and refugee students who “come from numerous languages backgrounds with little or no knowledge of the English language.” The Taft and Senn Newcomer Centers assist students in making the transitions from their homeland cultures to American culture.

This essay project essentially became a mini-documentation project. *Global Communities* provided these students with the materials needed for oral histories and single-use cameras to capture community scenes as well as images of interviewees. In most cases, this essay project meant immigrants researched on and wrote about their own communities. This included people from Albania, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Colombia, Cuba, Ecuador, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Iraq, Ireland, Jordan, Liberia, Mexico, Oromia, Pakistan, Palestine, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Puerto Rico, Romania, Russia, Somalia, Syria, Tibet, Togo, Venezuela, Vietnam, Yemen, and Yugoslavia, among other areas. The essays published here are the result of many hours of work by students and their teachers, including Mrs. Yelena Aller, Mr. Omar Kamara, and Ms. Madlena Puljas of Senn, Ms. Ruby Carlsen and Mr. Chuck Gutman of Taft, Ms. Karen K. Meyer of Mather, and Mrs. Sarah Peterson of St. Lambert, and Ms. Joy Ross, the director of the International Newcomer Centers. Mr. Gutman spearheaded the project for the International Newcomer Centers. Thanks to all of them for their hard work and dedication to this essay project.